

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER
LISTED

JUN 09 2005

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-9000a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Topeka High School

Other name/site number _____

2. Location

Street & number 800 SW 10th Avenue ☐ not for publication

City or town Topeka ☐ vicinity

State Kansas Code KS County Shawnee Code 177 Zip code 66612

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination
☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property
☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant
☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Christy Davis
Signature of certifying official/Title
Kansas State Historical Society

4/22/05
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional
Comments.)

Signature of commenting official /Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- ☐ entered in the National Register. _____
☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined eligible for the National
Register _____
☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register _____
- ☐ removed from the National
Register _____
- ☐ other, (explain:) _____

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
☒ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Historic Public Schools of Kansas

Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter Categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: School

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: School

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19th AND 20th CENTURY REVIVALS:
Late Gothic Revival (Collegiate Gothic)

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: Stone

Walls: Brick

Roof: Slate

Other: Stone

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education

Architecture

Period of Significance

1929-1955

Significant Dates

1929

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Thomas W. Williamson, Architect; John M. Leeper, Builder

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ Previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository:

Topeka High Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

UTM References

1																			
1	5	2	6	7	6	0	0	4	3	2	5	6	4	7					
Zone		Easting						Northing											

Figure 3 consists of three bar charts. The first chart, labeled 'Zone', has 10 bars with heights approximately 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. The second chart, labeled 'Easting', has 10 bars with heights approximately 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. The third chart, labeled 'Northing', has 10 bars with heights approximately 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

4

Verbal Boundary Description

Boundary Justification

11. Form Prepared By

Organization Preservation Planning and Design

Date 27 September, 2004

Street & number 10150 Onaga Road

Telephone 785-456-9857

City or town Wamego

State Kansas

Zip code 66547

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white** photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name USD 501, W.L. Sawyer, Superintendent

street & number 624 SW 24th

telephone 785-295-3000

city or town Topeka

state Kansas

zip code 66611

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 7 Page: 5

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

Narrative Description

Overview

Topeka High School is a large three-story complex located four blocks west of the state capitol in central Topeka. The grand structure, occupying a site of nearly four city blocks, reflects the capital city's decision to build a single high school, centrally located, to serve the entire city. The new school replaced a complex of three former structures located at 8th and Harrison. Designed in 1929, the large school features three distinct primary facades. The formal, symmetrical front facade faces south. The defining feature, an ornate carillon tower, rises 165 feet over the main building entrance. The east facade provides entry into the auditorium and the west facade into the gymnasium, each designed practically as a separate building. The Collegiate Gothic school is variegated English brick with Silverdale limestone detailing. The building has a truncated hip roof of Vermont slate and features large leaded glass windows with ornate stone tracery. The vast structure is carefully articulated with detailed features including projecting bays and windows, piers, and numerous, unique individual entrances. The building embodies typical characteristics of the Collegiate Gothic style including the pointed arches, gabled dormers, battlements or crenellations, and stone quoining. The vertical emphasis, tower spires, and elaborate tracery reflect a reference to the Perpendicular style, the last phase of English Gothic Revival. Topeka High School was a crowing achievement in the career of prominent Topeka architect, Thomas W. Williamson.

Site

Topeka High School is located on part of the original site of Bethany College, an Episcopalian girls' school founded in the 1860s. The site encompasses three-quarters of four city blocks bordered by Western Avenue on the west, 10th Avenue on the south, Polk Street on the east, and 8th Avenue on the north. The northeast quarter of the site is the location of Grace Episcopal Church, a Gothic Revival stone structure with twin towers framing the front of the building which faces 8th Avenue. The Bishop's house, originally located at 10th and Western was moved to its present location behind the church in 1929. The "Bethany Wall," a three-foot high stone wall was built between the two sites (the high school grounds and Grace Cathedral) in 1929 and remains today.

The high school is located on the south half of the four-block site - the original tract purchased by the school board in 1928 for a cost of \$142,000. The northwest quarter of the site was later purchased by the school board and a track constructed in 1962. A free-standing gymnasium is currently being constructed in the center of the track. A service drive off Polk Street provides access to the rear of the building, bordered by a stone retaining wall on the north. Small parking areas are provided northeast of the auditorium and at the rear of the gymnasium. A large surface parking lot is located across Western Avenue, west of the school. The site has concrete sidewalks around the entire perimeter and walks extend to the multiple entrances around the building. Two walkways, framing a grass lawn, extend from 10th Avenue to the front entrance. A brick kneewall frames a small, oval shaped veranda with stone pavers, at the front entrance. Two sidewalks also frame a small plaza at the auditorium entrance on the east side of the building called Constitution Plaza. A spar from the U.S.S. Constitution ("Old Ironsides"), was acquired with the assistance of Vice President Charles Curtis. The spar was mounted on a nautical base in the plaza to serve as a flagpole (dedicated in October of 1931). A replacement spar, also from the U.S.S. Constitution, was installed in 2004. There are twin entrances to the auditorium on the west side of the building. Wide sidewalks extend from Western Avenue to the two gym entrances. The original site had numerous mature trees that were retained in the construction of the new school. The large elms, oaks and pines create a picturesque, park-like setting for the school in central Topeka. A granite monument inscribed "Topeka High School," a gift of the class of 1959, is located on the lawn near 10th Avenue.

Architectural Style

Numerous, comprehensive descriptions of Topeka High School have been written. Architectural classifications include English Gothic, Perpendicular Gothic, Tudor, and Collegiate Gothic. According to Cyril M. Harris' book, *Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture*, Gothic architecture was the style of the High Middle Ages in Western Europe, emerging from the Romanesque and Byzantine forms in France in the later 12th century. Cathedrals are the classic representatives of the style, characterized by the pointed arch, rib vault, exterior flying buttress and richly decorated fenestration.¹ The

¹ Cyril M. Harris. *Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture*. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1983) 254.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

Section: 7 Page: 6

Gothic period lasted until the 16th century; in English architecture, the style is typically divided into three periods - Early English, Decorated, and Perpendicular.² Harris defines the Perpendicular style as the last and longest phase of Gothic architecture in England (1350-1550), the final development (1485-1547) is referred to as Tudor architecture.³ The Perpendicular style is characterized by its vertical emphasis and elaborate tracery.

Collegiate Gothic is a secular version of Gothic architecture, prevalent around the turn of the century in the United States and England, particularly on college campuses. Introduced to educational buildings at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, Collegiate Gothic emerged as a dominant style on the campuses of Princeton, Yale, Duke and the University of Chicago.⁴ Defining characteristics of the style – pointed arches, crenellations, and towers, are rooted in the 16th Century English Perpendicular style. Collegiate Gothic generally dates from 1890 to 1930. Although named for its emergence on college campuses, Collegiate Gothic was the dominant style of public school buildings across the nation by the end of the First World War.

In many ways, Topeka High School is a classical example of Collegiate Gothic architecture, but in other ways it is truly unique. Like most Collegiate Gothic buildings, Topeka High is a red brick building with stone detailing. The building embodies numerous design features characteristic of the style, including gabled roofs, crenellated parapets, pointed arch openings at doors and windows, stone quoining, and the dominating tower at the main entrance. The elaborate tracery on doors and windows, the ornate finals on the four corners of the tower, and the tall vertical form of the tower itself, are direct references to the English Perpendicular style which are also characteristic of Collegiate Gothic architecture.

Exterior

The design of Topeka High was completed in 1929, near the end of the Progressive Era in Kansas.⁵ This period was significant in terms of its effect on the design of public schools which resulted in the emergence of spaces being designed for specialized uses within a school. The Topeka High design was promoted as a "modern" school design, not in reference to its architectural style, but rather to its plan configuration. The layout of interior spaces and basic form of the building are the most outstanding features of the school's design. Although the building is recognized for its grand exterior, the plan configuration represented an emerging trend in school design – one based on interior configuration. This approach reflects a break from the established tradition of the rectangular or T-shaped buildings characteristic of the Progressive Era and resulted in the irregular plan shaped determined in large part, by the major interior spaces including the gymnasium, auditorium, cafeteria, and library. The building was designed so that numerous major activities could occur simultaneously in the school building, with minimal congestion or intermingling of participants. Key public spaces including the gymnasium, auditorium, art gallery, and library were located, each with separate entrances. Additionally, classrooms were clustered by use with attention to specialized needs such as outdoor access for manual training shops, sound isolation for music and typing classrooms, and small stages for English classrooms. The configuration of interior spaces was the predominant factor in the building form.

The building is a three-story structure with a partial basement and full attic, constructed of reinforced concrete with hollow clay tile walls. The primary roof form is a truncated hip on the main building and gymnasium, with multiple intersecting gabled dormers. The roofs have crenellated parapets in select locations, with a plain stone cap. There are copper cupolas at the intersection of the main roof and angled end wings. Each cupola is topped by a weather vane – a scholar reading a book. There are three brick chimneys, detailed with patterned brick and decorative stone. The main and gymnasium roofs were Vermont slate (extant on the south facade of the main building). Composition shingle and built-up roofs were used on secondary spaces. The plan form is generally rectangular with wings projecting at an angle on the southeast and southwest corners of the building. The auditorium is located on the east end of the building. The gymnasium is located on the west end of the building, extending beyond the southwest wing and creating an asymmetrical building footprint.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 410.

⁴ Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

⁵ The Progressive Era is typically defined as spanning from 1900-1920; however, the period extended until the Great Depression in Kansas.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 7 Page: 7

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

In the simplest terms, the school has running bond, variegated English brick exterior walls, with Silverdale limestone foundation and detailing. The original multi-pane wood windows included a variety of sizes, configurations, and styles around the building. The typical window style was 6/9 or 6/6 double hung, configured in sets of three or four windows. Exterior doors also varied in design. The most prominent doors were multi-pane over a single panel, wood doors with ornate tracery; others were multi-pane or paneled wood doors. The entrances are generally defined with multi-light transoms and arched stone surrounds. The original doors and windows have been replaced but the original configuration has been retained.

A unique and defining characteristic of the design of Topeka High School is the attention to detail and unique treatment of the primary facades and multiple building entrances. Classroom wings have a base, industrial design with brick facades and horizontal bands of multiple windows. But the large structure is brought to a personal scale with careful articulation of the numerous facades through the use of piers, stone quoining, and detailed features such as projecting bays. Window treatments including leaded glass, varying stone surrounds, and stone tracery define featured interior spaces.

There are three primary building facades and numerous secondary facades, most distinguished with individual building entrances. The front (south) facade faces 10th Avenue. The 165 foot tower, at the south main entrance, is visible at most approaches to the building. The tower is comprised of four sections or layers. The lower two sections are framed by brick buttresses with stone quoining. The two-story base of the tower is the main building entrance. It is cut ashlar stone with carved, ornate detailing. A two-story gothic arched surround frames the ground level entrance and a leaded glass second floor window with stone tracery. The original entrance was a set of five multi-pane, paneled wood doors with wood tracery. An arched transom with vertical mullions topped the set of doors. A crenellated parapet defines the top of the tower base. Hexagonal stone piers with stepped conical caps frame the base of the tower. The second section of the tower extends above the roof line and is defined by its simplicity. This area is a plain brick wall, laid in a diamond/diagonal pattern with a single narrow leaded glass window. The window surround is stone quoins with a projecting label stone lintel. This section of the tower is framed by brick pilasters with stone quoins, inside of the brick buttresses. The upper two sections of the tower are predominantly ashlar stone. The third section is framed by hexagonal brick pilasters with stone quoins. Two gothic arched openings on each side of the tower are open air, with stone tracery. The tower is capped with a crenellated stone parapet framed by hexagonal spires with conical caps at each corner.

The south facade, between the two projecting wings, is comprised of three bays. The tower is the center section of the central bay. It is flanked by three-story wings with two pairs of windows, stacked with a carved stone panel between (a coat of arms and a book). The flanking ends of the center bay are brick with a stone base and crenellated parapet. The end bays are similar but differ slightly in the pattern of window and door openings. The end bays are defined by regularly spaced windows with quoined stone surrounds, identical on each floor. An intersecting gable dormer with narrow slot window, defines the center of each end bay. On the west, there is a projecting stone bay on the upper two floors, capped by a crenellated parapet. On the east, the projecting stone bay is full height, extending from the ground to the eave. Two-story windows and a crenellated parapet reflect the location of a stairwell on the end of the east bay.

The southeast and southwest facades of the projecting wings are similar but not identical. Like the south facade of the main building, the facades are brick with a stone base and regularly spaced windows with quoined stone surrounds. On the east wing, a small projecting bay is characterized by random ashlar stone and a crenellated parapet, topped by an intersecting gabled dormer. The west wing is a classroom wing distinguished by a featured classroom on each floor. The rooms are located in the southeast corner of the wing and defined on the exterior by twin intersecting gabled dormers and a central projecting bay of random ashlar stone. A secondary entry is located on the end of each bay. The west end is asymmetrical with a central entry. There is a gabled dormer on the northwest end of the facade. The two-story projecting entry bay is comprised of an oriel window on the 2nd floor, over an arched entrance. The bay is defined by stone quoined buttresses. A stepped, exterior chimney, with stone quoining, rises from the southeast corner of the wing. The library entrance, on the southeast end of the east bay, is also asymmetrical with a gabled dormer on the south side and a crenellated parapet on the north. The central entry bay projects from the exterior facade; it has stepped corners with stone quoining and a crenellated parapet. A stepped brick chimney is integral with the projecting entry, located on the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 7 Page: 8

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

north side of the entrance. A set of three doors with an arched transom resembles the main entrance. A stone panel over the doors is inscribed with a verse by Henry Ward Beecher, "Books are the windows by which the soul looks out." The east elevation is comprised of two primary sections – the north side of the southeast wing and the auditorium. The library occupies the south end of the east wing, on the second floor. The library facade, the southeast three-quarters of the north facade) is divided into seven bays by projecting brick piers with stone quoining, and further distinguished by a crenellated parapet. The center five bays have two-story arched, leaded-glass windows with stone tracery, spanning the upper floors. Biology classrooms are located on the ground floor of the east wing; each bay has sets of three windows between the brick piers. The only addition to the original structure has been the construction of a one-story greenhouse on the northwest end of the east wing.

The auditorium facade is symmetrical with stepped, quoined corners. The center bay projects from the west facade as does a one-story foyer which extends north and south of the center bay. A full-height stone projecting bay, with a crenellated parapet, is the dominant feature of the center bay. The auditorium entrances were three pairs of two light paneled doors with wood tracery and arched multi-light transoms. The central door, in the projecting bay, has a stone surround and the flanking side doors have quoined stone surrounds. There are leaded glass windows on the 2nd floor of the projecting bay. The projection room is located in the third floor of the projecting bay, with louvered panels in the masonry openings. There are additional entrances on the ends of the auditorium, originally, a pair of paneled wood doors with quoined stone surrounds. Secondary entrances to the main building are located on the north and south ends of the west facade. The south entry provides access to the main east/west classroom corridor. The entrance is a pair of two-light paneled doors with arched multi-light transom. A stairwell is located inside this entrance and is defined by a gabled dormer and large multi-pane window on the upper facade. The entrance north of the auditorium provides access to the manual training and music rooms along the north side of the building. The north entry is a small one-story projection with a crenellated parapet. The entry is off-center, a pair of doors with a multi-light transom and ogee arched stone surround.

The north side (rear) of the building is unadorned, compared to the elaborate detailing typical of the primary facades. The rear facade is comprised of four sections, defined primarily by roof form and massing. The three-story east section has a truncated hip roof with gabled dormers on each end. The next section is the manual training rooms; this area is two-stories in height with taller ceilings than the normal classrooms; therefore the windows do not align with those on the rest of the building. The third section of the rear facade is a two-story, rectangular form that projects from the rear facade. This area housed the auto mechanics shop on the ground floor and girls' gymnasium on the second floor. The two central sections of the rear facade have flat built-up roofs, with simple, crenellated parapets. A tall brick chimney rises above the roof on the east side of the projecting shop/gym. The west section of the rear facade is the gymnasium. The rear facade of the gymnasium is seven bays wide, with intersecting gabled dormers at the 2nd, 4th, and 6th bays. There are sets of two and three windows on the lower two floors, with quoined stone surrounds.

The west facade is the gymnasium. Like the auditorium on the east, it is a finely articulated design that rivals the front (south) facade in its detailing. This section of the building is a large rectangular space comprised of a central gymnasium and flanking locker rooms on the north and south sides of the first floor. Small, individual gyms for "corrective" gymnastics are located over the locker rooms on the second floor and gymnasium bleachers on the third floor. The three-story space has a truncated hip roof with composition shingles (originally, slate). Twin entry vestibules are located on the west facade. The facade is comprised of three bays; the projecting entry vestibules are located in the center of the end bays. Each entrance is raised above grade, accessed by steps framed by stone kneewalls. The entrances originally had two pairs of paneled wood doors with multi-light transoms. Each doorway is framed by a gothic arched stone surround and capped by a projecting label stone cornice. The entry bays are one-story and have a stepped, crenellated parapet with a carved stone panel centered over the entrances. A single, narrow window flanks the doorways on the entry vestibules. The end bays are defined by projecting brick piers with stone quoining. The piers are comprised of three horizontal bands distinguished by treatments. The base is brick with stone quoins on the corners. The middle section is a smooth stone panel with a chevron top. The top of the piers are brick and octagonal in shape. Each horizontal band is stepped. The piers are repeated at a central gabled dormer, over the projecting entry vestibule. The projecting piers frame three large, 2-story windows on the central bay of the west facade. The multi-pane windows have gothic arched stone surrounds integral with the piers between the windows. A secondary entrance is located on the west facade, between the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

Section: 7 Page: 9

gymnasium and southwest wing, providing access to the main east/west classroom corridor. The entrance was a pair of paneled doors with multi-light arched transom, topped by a label stone lintel.

The multi-paned windows, gabled dormers, crenellated parapets, gothic arched openings, and stone quoining are recurring treatments that serve to unify the distinctive individual facades. The exterior of the building closely resembles its original appearance. The original doors and windows have been replaced but the replacement windows resemble the style and profile of the original windows. Contemporary metal-framed glass doors have been installed but the original multi-paned transoms are in place in most locations. The only addition to the building has been the construction of a small greenhouse on the northwest side of the east wing. The greenhouse is nearly obscured by mature trees. The existing track was built on the northwest quarter of the school grounds in 1962. The exterior of the building was cleaned and repointed in 1974 and the veranda/plaza at the main entrance was restored with new paving stones in 1998. A new gymnasium is under construction off the northwest corner of the original gymnasium. It will be a free-standing building with no adverse effect on the original structure. The exterior of the school and the grounds retain a high degree of integrity.

Interior

The plan form of the high school is a modified rectangle. The projecting east and west wings on the southeast and southwest corners of the front of the building form a "K" shaped plan. Despite the formal, symmetrical configuration of the front facade and projecting wings, the plan form is not symmetrical. The gymnasium on the west end of the building extends beyond the west wing. The auditorium is located on the east end of the building. The main entrance is centrally located on the south (front) facade. The main corridor runs parallel to the front of the building, and extends to the projecting wings on the southeast and southwest corners of the building. Each of the wings is a double-loaded corridor. A manual training classroom wing is located along the rear (north) side of the building. Music rooms are located on the upper floors at the northwest corner of this wing. The wing is accessed by a second east/west corridor that runs along the north side of the auditorium, the length of the building to the gymnasium entrance on the north end of the west facade. North/south corridors on the east side of the gym and on the west side of the auditorium complete the circulation around a central core. Two light courts provide natural lighting for classrooms and the cafeteria in the central core. The kitchen and cafeteria are located in the middle of the central core on the first floor. Classrooms are located off the north/south corridors, opposite the gymnasium and auditorium, on all three floors. The central core is primarily comprised of classroom space on the upper floors. As previously noted, the school is configured by use. Classrooms are clustered by use and defined by a number of customized spaces.

The building has basements under three areas of the building. Tunnels lead to unexcavated, crawl space under the remainder of the building, called the "catacombs" by generations of students. Stairs and a freight elevator off the north corridor lead to the central basement that houses the boiler and mechanical equipment, as well as storage space. There are also basements under the gymnasium and the auditorium. Dressing rooms and storage are located under the stage in the auditorium. An attic spans the entire building.

Following the opening of the school in 1931, there were a number of feature articles on the school in state and national magazines and newspapers. Some of the articles provided thorough descriptions of the new school, written by the president of the school board and the principal. The accounts are strikingly similar and perhaps scripted from an unknown source. Most of the articles featured photographs of the recently completed school. These photos are included at the end of the nomination. Following is the description of the school by John H. Linn, President of the Topeka Board of Education, as printed in the October 1932 issue of *The Kansas Teacher*, entitled "The New Topeka High School."

...As you enter the building, you will note the calm dignity of the stone and marble entrance, the length and generous width of the spacious well-lighted corridors, the inlaid linoleum sound-deadening floors, the lovely Tennessee marble wainscoting, and the practical lockers flush with the walls.

...Of course, the most important part of the building is to be found in the seventy classrooms. These are of good size, each made to accommodate at least thirty students. Each is individually ventilated with fresh air from the outside. The lighting is not only ample, but soft and well diffused. All rooms have linoleum floors, with colored cement boarder and wall base. Each

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 7 Page: 10

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

room has a local telephone, an outlet for the radio loudspeaker, a clock, a program bell, an automatic temperature control, a large bookcase, and a built-in steel filing cabinet. Desk chairs are used for seating.

Laboratories are provided for biology, botany, chemistry, physics, clothing, foods, arts, and journalism. Each is equipped with furnishings of the latest type.... At the opposite end of each laboratory is a lecture room with raised seats, and an instructor's demonstration table.... The foods laboratories include a number of unit kitchens in addition to the two main laboratories, all in plain view of the instructor; also a model apartment, where girls are trained in the care of the home; and a home nursing room, where girls are given special training by the high school nurse in child care and care of the sick.

The shops are located at the rear of the building, with an outside entrance. They have north lighting and high ceilings. The floors, excepting in the auto-mechanics shop, are of wood blocks, end grain. The walls are of glazed tile.... Nearby are two large, well-lighted rooms for mechanical drawing, with blue print room between.... The print shop and journalism rooms are on the floor above.

The commercial department is in the southwest wing and includes specially equipped rooms for teaching bookkeeping, shorthand, typewriting, and office training. The ceilings of the typewriting room are acoustically treated with sound-absorbing material.

The music department is located back of the auditorium in acoustically treated rooms, soundproofed from the rest of the building. It includes a chorus room and a band room with office and music library adjacent; and over these a large room for both chorus and orchestra practice.... Next to this is an instrument room with lockers for all sizes and shapes of instruments. These rooms have entrances, separate from those of the rest of the building, convenient for evening practice.

The art department has an interesting group of rooms. The art studio has full north lighting, and is well equipped with suitable furniture and other facilities. There are two art galleries, one large and one small, equipped in the latest manner with indirect lighting and monk's cloth wall covering. The Topeka Art Guild maintains office and library in connection with the galleries, and provides semi-monthly art exhibits, showing the work of local and nationally known artists. High school students pass through the galleries en route to and from the art studio or classroom.

The library is an outstanding feature of the building. Its beauty and quiet dignity is indeed inspiring. The library room is 40 x 80 feet, and extends through two full stories. The floor is covered with handsome brown tiled linoleum. Overhead is an attractive English beamed ceiling. Designed closely after the Great Hall at Hampton Court, the bank of high windows with their delicate stone tracery and their leaded cathedral glass panels are very beautiful. At one end of the room is a carved stone fireplace with graceful Tudor arch, and over this and under the balcony alcoves are oak linen-fold panels. The room seats 200 pupils. The tables and chairs are of Tudor design and made specially for this room. On top of the book shelving, which encircles the room, is a concealed indirect lighting system, with automatic photocell control. Adjoining the main reading room are a number of small rooms for conference or special reference work. Above these rooms is a balcony in which rare and interesting old books or manuscripts are displayed....

The gymnasium is one of the largest and best-equipped in the state. With bleacher seating, it will seat 3500, every seat in plain view of the floor. It is roofed with steel trusses and has a standard maple floor. The entrance and corridors have terrazzo floors. The separate entrance makes its use independent of the rest of the building. There is a separate gymnasium for girls, the floor of which is covered with linoleum. There are well equipped rooms for corrective physical training, shower rooms, equipment storage rooms, a hand ball court, towel room, drying room, room for visiting team, and office for the director of athletics.

In the southwest wing of the building are three unusually attractive rooms, one on each floor, each of which will accommodate about 100 persons. The one on the first floor, near an outside entrance, is a social room. It has a small stage at one end of the room and a fireplace at the other. On the outside is an alcove with several large windows. On the second floor, near the language classrooms, is the Classical room. It also contains a stage. The room is decorated with friezes depicting classical literature and history. The pillars framing the large, beautifully draped window, the pattern of the linoleum floor, and the furniture, are all of classical design. Niches are provided for statues. Over one of these is a brick from an ancient wall of Rome. Directly above on the third floor, near the English class rooms, is the English room. The design of this room and its furniture is of the Elizabethan period. There is a fireplace with book cases on each side. At the other end of the room is a stage. The linoleum tiled floor, the beamed ceiling, the period furniture, combine to make the room distinctly English. These special rooms are used for dramatization of class work and for social and group meetings.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 7 Page: 11

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

One of the most beautiful rooms in the building is the auditorium. It has a seating capacity of 2500, sufficient to seat at one time the entire student body. The seats are comfortable opera chairs, every one in plain view of the stage. The aisles are carpeted. There is a mush-room ventilator under every other seat. The walls of the room are beautifully but simply decorated. The architecture is Gothic. The stage is large and fully equipped with the most modern scenery. Adjoining the stage are two large property rooms. There is a motion picture booth and space for a large pipe organ. The lighting of the stage and of the auditorium is ideal. The mezzanine is richly carpeted and appropriately finished. An outside entrance makes the use of the auditorium for public gatherings independent of the rest of the building.

...The high school offices are located near the main entrance... Directly across the hall are the restrooms; and for students who are ill, the clinic and the office of the high school nurse. All toilets have terrazzo floors and high tiled walls....

The cafeteria is located on the first floor in the center of the building.... As one enters this large room, he gets the impression of a great baronial hall. The high beamed ceiling is acoustically treated. The floor is covered with linoleum. The wainscoting around the room has a walnut-grained finish. At the far end of the room is a carved stone fireplace of Tudor design.... The room is so arranged that it may be used for various social functions. There are four serving lines entering from widely separated points on two floors of the building, making it possible to serve 800 students at once without congestion. The huge kitchen immediately back of the four serving counters is well lighted and well ventilated. It has terrazzo floors.... Directly off the kitchen, with its own serving counter, is a second small dining room for the use of the faculty.

The above description of the original building illustrates the effort to cluster classrooms based on their uses, the attention to detail in classroom equipment, and special features throughout the building. What is amazing is that in an operating public school, a significant amount of these original features and finishes are extant nearly seventy-five years after the building was constructed.

Alterations

The school has experienced some alterations through the years. In 1937, the school board commissioned David Overmyer, a Topeka High graduate who painted murals in the state capitol, to paint a large mural in the faculty dining room. The project was funded through the Work Projects Administration.

In 1955 the state fire marshal required installation of fire doors in corridors throughout the school. Despite protests by architect Thomas Williamson, the fire marshal said the stair towers had to be enclosed. Forty-two fire doors were installed. These doors were removed in the early 1990s. The cafeteria was also remodeled in 1955; new lights were installed and the room sound proofed. The tables and chairs were replaced in the 1970s. However, the Topeka High Historical Society has restored one of the original wrought-iron chandeliers, in front of the fireplace, and re-hung tapestry-like curtains on the windows. Some of the original cafeteria tables are located in the faculty dining room.

The original school design featured a swimming pool beneath the gymnasium but the pool was not built due to rising costs and concerns regarding segregation. Water connections and drain openings for future construction were installed in 1931. The pool was built in 1957 and used for forty-five years. It was closed in 2003.

In 1958 the balcony of the gym was converted to an audiovisual room. This area was partially restored in the 1990s and now serves as the location for the band during games. The locker rooms were enlarged in the late 1960s. A three-year "renovation" program commenced in 1959 through which new lights were installed in most classrooms and the gymnasium. Walls were also repainted. Some exterior doors were warped and deteriorated with termite damage; all of the doors were replaced in the late 1950s.

Although some classrooms have been reconfigured in response to curriculum changes, many rooms still serve their original function. The cafeteria, gymnasium, library, art gallery, and main offices are all extant in their original locations. The three specially designed rooms in the west wing are intact, now used as classrooms. In the 1970s, the original tile floor and light fixtures were removed from the Classical room. The Topeka High Historical Society restored the room to resemble its original appearance with a new tile floor and replica light fixtures. The band room has also been redone and now resembles its original design. The Art Gallery was redone in 1982. The project preserved the original beam-and-cove ceiling, the plaster frieze and the pocket doors.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section: 7 Page: 12

**Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas**

In general, extant original features include chalk boards and built-in cabinets in many classrooms, lockers in the corridors, chandeliers in the foyers, auditorium, library, and some classrooms, tables in the wood shop, furnishings in the library and faculty cafeteria, the four fireplaces, numerous terrazzo stairways with cast-iron railings, the original Deagan chimes in the tower (recently restored), a majority of interior doors and wood trim, the glazed brick window sills and wood window frames, and the leaded glass windows (being restored as funds allow). Original finishes include plaster, ceramic tile, and glazed tile walls, marble wainscoting, and terrazzo and linoleum floor coverings.

In 1969, the firm of Thomas Williamson and Associates was hired to develop a phased, remodeling program for the school. The proposed alterations resulted, in part, from implementation of "the school within a school" concept on which the new Topeka West High School was designed. The concept utilized four individual "schools" each containing 500 students, within the single building; two "schools" to be located on each of the second and third floors. Thomas Williamson Jr. and Jim Reeves, associates in the Williamson firm, designed the plan. It identified a 19-step plan that involved changes in most areas of the building. The "school within a school" concept was implemented and the classroom configurations changed on the upper floors to accommodate division offices, conference areas, and work spaces. At least some of these phases were implemented, but many, such as the remodeling of the library, were never completed.

As previously noted, the windows were replaced in 1982 and suspended ceilings were installed in most locations throughout the building in the early 1990s. The original linoleum has been replaced in the first floor corridor and most classrooms. Air conditioning was installed in 2000.

The auditorium closely resembles its original design. After the school opened, the orchestra pit was covered with a wood floor. In the early 1960s, the floor was removed and the pit restored to its original depth. In the mid 1980s, the orchestra pit was altered again to maximize flexibility. The pit can be covered to accommodate a thrust stage (theater in the round) or the covering removed to reveal the original design. A sound booth was added at the rear of the auditorium, and the first two rows of seats were removed to make the auditorium more accessible. In 1994, one of the center chandeliers was destroyed during routine maintenance. The seats damaged when the chandelier fell were replaced with the original seats from the first two rows. Degginger's Foundry in Topeka designed and cast a replica fixture and few can distinguish it from the original. The carpeting in the aisles and mezzanine has been replaced; care was taken to select a carpet that was similar to the style and color of the original carpet. The original seats are extant but have been re-upholstered. The original Deagan chimes in the Tower were restored by the Booster Club and the Topeka High Historical Society in 1999.

Without question, Topeka High School has experienced far fewer modifications than most operating schools. The interior retains a very high degree of integrity. This is due in part to the recognition of students and administration alike, that the school is an outstanding facility, in design and detail. Its preservation is due in part to the Topeka High Historical Society, founded in the mid-1980s. The Historical Society maintains an office in the school and has a collection of historic photos and artifacts of the school.

The original design documents by Thomas Williamson and Company, including drawings of Topeka High School, are available at the Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 8 Page: 13

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

Narrative Statement of Significance

Overview

Topeka High School Topeka High School is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under the multiple property documentation form, *Historic Public Schools of Kansas*, as a representative of the City High School property type. The school is significant under National Register Criterion A, as the capital city's central high school that continues in operation today, and Criterion C – Architecture, as an outstanding representative of a Collegiate Gothic public school building. Constructed at a cost of nearly \$1.8 million in 1930, the school reflected the city's decision to build a centrally located high school to serve the entire city. The school embodies traditional characteristics of the Collegiate Gothic style with its red brick exterior and stone detailing, pointed arches, multiple gable roofs, crenellations and the dominant carillon tower over the main entrance. The design of the school reflects an emerging trend in which the layout of specialized interior spaces dictated exterior form, a departure from the rectangular boxes characteristic of the Progressive Era. Topeka High School is significant on a state and local level as the work of Thomas Williamson and Co., a Topeka architectural firm responsible for the design of over two hundred public schools in the state of Kansas.

Topeka's Early Schools⁵

Topeka was founded in 1854 and private grammar schools were established shortly thereafter. In 1861, when Kansas was admitted to the Union, Topeka was organized as Shawnee County School District No. 23. The first school board was established six years later under a state law that provided for a board of school commissioners in larger cities. In the 1860s, Topeka was a town of approximately 6,000 population, committed to educational, as well as commercial development. Two colleges were established in the mid-1860s, Lincoln (later Washburn) College, and Bethany College, a girls' seminary founded by the Episcopalians on the site of the current high school. Topeka's first school building was the Harrison Street School, built in 1865. The first Topeka class graduating from a graded course of study was from the Harrison Street School in 1870.

On August 18, 1871, the Board of Education passed a resolution to establish the city's first high school: "Resolved, that this board organize and establish a High School department in the Lincoln school building to commence with the opening of the public schools...."⁶ Topeka High School was officially opened in 1871 on the third floor of the Lincoln School. For the first twenty years, the high school was shuffled from one location to another. The high school was moved to the Washburn building at 10th and Jackson (called Washburn High School) the following year but later transferred back to the Lincoln building. In 1882, there were one hundred high school students. The school was moved to a temporary home in the Hudson Block (over the *Daily Capital* and Y.M.C.A.) from 1887-1894. In 1893, attendance at the high school had outgrown the existing facility and bonds were issued to build a new high school. Topeka High School, a Romanesque building, was built on the northwest corner of 8th and Harrison and completed at a cost of \$85,000 in 1894. By 1903, the school population reached one thousand students and a decision was made to construct a Manual Training High School. The school was built across the street, on the southwest corner of 8th and Harrison and completed at a cost of \$100,000 in 1905. One-third of the building was used for manual training, the remainder for academic classes. Within ten years, the school became overcrowded and in 1914-15, a cafeteria and auditorium addition was built on the north school and the former auditorium converted to classrooms. Crowded conditions persisted and the school acquired additional ground north of the north building. A portable frame building was constructed to serve as a library and study hall. In 1923, an Administration building, called the Annex, was built on the west side of the south building (Manual Training High School). The new building included six classrooms on the upper floor and the former offices in the north building were converted to additional classrooms. The multiple additions and remodeling did little to accommodate the growth of the city's school-age population. In 1924, the fire marshal closed the 4th floor of the north building, forcing the board to convert the auditorium in the south building into classrooms. The fire marshal was later quoted that the north building was the "biggest fire trap in the city," contributing to a widespread call for a new fire-proof high school.

⁵ Information on early Topeka schools was taken primarily from the chapter entitled "Historical Sketch," in *Forty Years of History in the Topeka High School*, W. Lee Fergus, ed., 1910.

⁶ W. Lee Fergus, ed. *Forty Years of History in the Topeka High School*. Topeka: Western Printing Co., 1910: 10.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 8 Page: 14

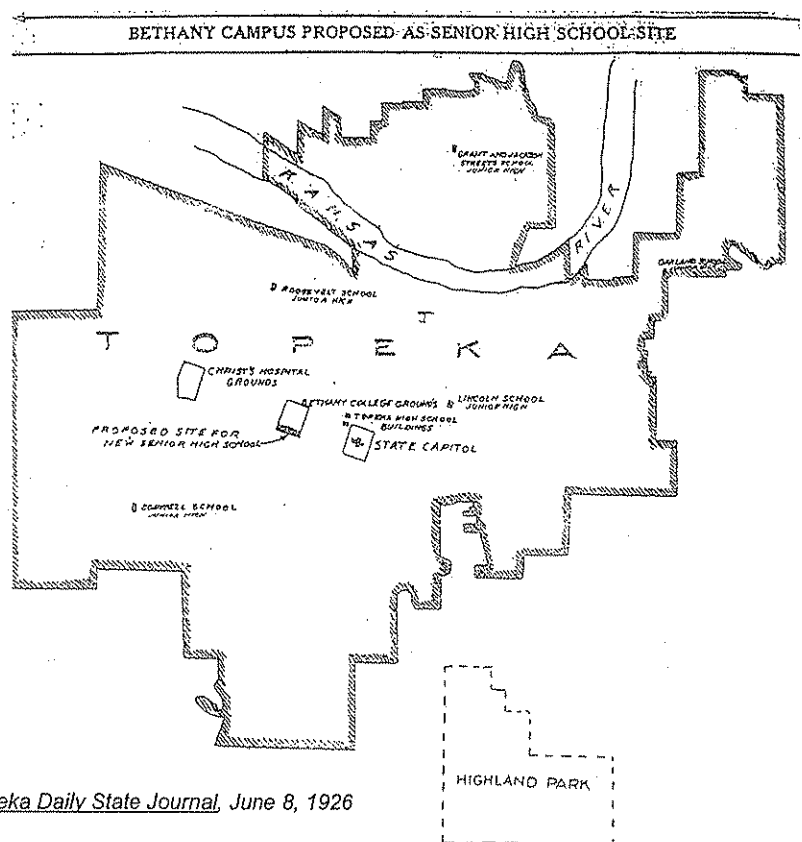
Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, KansasThe 1920s Building Boom⁷

Like the rest of the nation, Topeka experienced a school building boom in the 1920s. Overcrowded conditions plagued not only the high school, but all levels of the city schools. Junior High instruction began in Topeka in 1915. In the early 1920s, the school board adopted the policy of establishing neighborhood junior high schools, similar to the distribution of grade schools in residential areas throughout the city. By the mid-1920s, there were nearly 580 students in the 9th grade. The board's decision to construct neighborhood junior high schools to serve grades 7-9 helped alleviate crowded conditions at the high school, but the high school population had increased over 500 students in ten years. The city's school facilities were in dire need of improvement and expansion. A bond issue was passed in 1924 to build four new grade schools and four junior high schools. Schools constructed included Monroe, Clay, Randolph and Gage grade schools and Roosevelt, Curtis, Holliday, and Crane junior high schools. Washington and McKinley schools were also expanded as part of the bond issue. The final component of the 1924 bond issue was the purchase of a site for a new Topeka High School.

Planning the New High School

The selection of a site for the new high school was a serious endeavor. Some felt the city should construct two or three separate high schools. There was extensive study of enrollment patterns, and the population and distribution of school-age children in the city. The cost of building two or three smaller schools was compared to building a single, large school. Based on the cost data and the conclusion that Topeka was not expected to grow much larger, the decision was made to build a single high school.⁸ A local lawyer, George McDermott, was chairman of the Board of Education's site committee. The committee's report was printed in the April 25, 1927 Board of Education minutes. The committee endorsed the decision to build a single high school due to the fact that equipment and teaching budgets would double or triple with two or three schools. They reported the general consensus that one high school was preferable in cities of up to 125,000 population. The geographic center of the school population was determined to be west of Tyler Street and south of 8th Street. The committee recommended that an entire city block would be required for the site, and that the school should be recessed "so that it would be an addition to the City's public buildings, and not just another building."

Topeka Daily State Journal, June 8, 1926



The site committee was concerned with the prospect of having to buy a site with several houses that would need to be removed. Mr. McDermott even asked for the taxpayers' assistance in finding a site for the new school. Bethany College occupied a choice location on two city blocks in central Topeka. The site had several buildings, numerous old trees, and Grace Cathedral on the northeast corner. In 1927, Bishop James Wise of the Diocese of Kansas offered to sell a large

⁷ Information of the 1920s bond issue was taken from two primary sources: the article, "Report is Made," by Board of Education President Chester Woodward in the *Topeka Journal*, July 21, 1928; and "Topeka High School-A Short History," a speech given by Ed Love at the 1983 Annual Meeting of the Shawnee County Historical Society in Topeka.

⁸ Thomas Williamson, "Topeka High," *Topeka Magazine*, 1 (April, 1974): 40. (Reprinted as a separate pamphlet in 1986).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 8 Page: 15

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

part of the grounds to the school board and to move the remains of the college to the Christ's Hospital grounds.⁹ The board purchased the south half of the grounds, a tract roughly from 9th to 10th Avenues and from Polk to Western, for the price of \$142,000 and received an option for the northwest corner of the grounds between 8th and 9th Avenues.

A committee of six local architects was appointed the task of studying and preparing estimates for construction of the new central high school. Members of the committee included Frank C. Squires, Chairman, Cuthbert & Suehrk, Thos. W. Williamson, W.E. Glover, Ralph E. Scamell, and R. A. Finney, Consulting Engineer. The committee's report was printed in the 1928 Board of Education summary. Individual members of the committee estimated the required cubic feet for the new school and the cost of construction. The committee reported the new school would require a building of 3,327,300 cubic feet and could be constructed for a cost of 30.3 cents per cubic foot (reflecting an average of the member's estimates). The proposal totaled \$1,008,171.90, exclusive of equipment, architect fees, and landscaping.

At the November election in 1928, bonds in the amount of \$1,100,000 to finance the new high school were put to a vote of the residents. The new school would cost taxpayers 90 cents for every \$1000 valuation. The bonds were approved by a vote of 2 to 1.

Thomas Williamson to Design the New School

Thomas Williamson had an established relationship with the Topeka Board of Education. As noted, Williamson served on the Committee of Architects asked by the board to prepare estimates of the size and cost of the proposed new high school. Williamson had previously designed a number of Topeka schools including seven of the eight recently completed junior high and grade schools in the city (Randolph, Clay, and Monroe grade schools, and Roosevelt, Crane, Holliday, and Curtis junior high schools).

In Williamson's memoirs, he discusses his selection as the architect for Topeka High School.¹⁰ Williamson noted that Chester Woodward, President of the Topeka Board of Education, was one of his best friends and supporter in the recently completed junior high and grade schools. Woodward felt that the high school was "the biggest thing they (the school board) ever did and they should get an architect with wide experience in buildings of this magnitude." Williamson noted that he talked to Woodward about the school many times, "trying to convince him that our experience with the other buildings (Topeka schools) had been such that we could go right on with the high school and build a building that we would all be proud of." Williamson also noted that the rest of the school board was reluctant to go with a local firm "unless, or until Mr. Woodward could be convinced."

At the January 11, 1929, meeting of the Board of Education, it was proposed that the board indicate their preference by ballot for an architect or architects of the new high school. The ballots cast included Thomas Williamson – 3 votes, Thomas Williamson and Walter Glover – 1 vote, and an association of two Topeka architects, preference given to Thomas Williamson and Walter Glover – 1 vote. The board proceeded to a second vote; the results were 4 votes for Thomas Williamson and one vote for Thomas Williamson and Walter Glover. It was declared that Thomas Williamson was selected unanimously as the architect for the proposed new senior high school.¹¹

In his memoirs, Williamson wrote, "finally, after several weeks the board voted, with Mr. Woodward's consent, that they would give us the commission provided I select a designer, and mechanical engineer, and a structural engineer, that would meet the approval of the board. In due time, I submitted the names of the men in our organization that filled these respective positions namely, Ted Griest for designer, Frank Williamson as mechanical engineer, and Roy Finney as the structural engineer. The board immediately approved the selection of the two engineers but did not approve the designer." According to Williamson, Woodward insisted on a designer with much wider experience. Williamson submitted

⁹ Love, 2-3.

¹⁰ Topeka historian and THS graduate, Doug Wallace provided copies of information on Topeka High from "memoirs" in Thomas Williamson's own hand. The memoirs, (never published), or at least the section on Topeka High, had been written by Williamson in 1959.

¹¹ The minutes of the January 11, 1929 Board of Education meeting are reprinted in A.T.H.S. Scrapbook 1871-1971 compiled by Danny Callison and Judy Cromwell and printed by Hall Lithographing Co., inc. in 1979.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 8 Page: 16

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

the names of several men "that had distinguished themselves as designers, but none of them seemed to fill the bill." Williamson wrote, "Finally, we agreed upon the name of Linus Burr Smith who at that time was assistant head of the Architectural department of Kansas State College."

Linus Burr Smith, was born in Minneapolis, Kansas and raised in Hutchinson. He graduated with a degree in architecture from Kansas State Agricultural College in 1926 and became a teacher at the college following graduation. In 1928 Smith was awarded the Eugene Dodd Medal for work at Harvard in 1927. Smith may have attended school part time; he completed his masters degree from Harvard in 1931. While at Harvard, he studied with one of the world's leading architects, J.J. Hoffner.¹² This award may have been a factor in his selection to work on Topeka High in 1929. Burr continued to teach in Manhattan until 1934. He designed the Beta Theta Pi fraternity house in Manhattan in 1931 and the stadium at Haskell Institute in Lawrence. In 1934, he was appointed to head the Architectural department at Nebraska University. An article announcing his appointment stated, "In Kansas, he is especially well known for having designed the new \$1,500,000 Topeka high school building...." Smith remained at Nebraska until his retirement in the 1970s.

Ted Griest, an associate in the Williamson firm, is widely credited as the designer of Topeka High School. Griest began work for Williamson in 1923. However, it is reported that Griest took a one year leave to complete an advanced study at Harvard in 1929-1930 (around the time that the high school was designed).¹³ A Topeka Capital article in June of 1930 reports that Griest was back at work with the Williamson firm, having completed study at Harvard. The same article states that Griest was the designer of the new high school building, as well as Randolph, Curtis, Crane, and Clay schools in Topeka. The article quotes Williamson saying, "I don't know how we would get along without Ted. He is one of the outstanding leaders in architectural design and I don't believe there is a man west of the Mississippi who could beat him. He does practically all our design work."¹⁴ A September 9, 1998, Topeka Capital Journal article ("Topekan's Design for Life' Included Courthouse, Judicial Center"), credits Louis Spencer, another Williamson associate, as chief architect during the design of Topeka High School. The article "Vision of Model High School Now Nearing Reality," in the 50th Anniversary Edition of the Topeka Daily Capital (August 25, 1929), reported that "after the various department plans had been fitted together in the floor arrangements, the more subtle task of giving the building a beautiful appearance and quiet scholastic atmosphere, was turned over to L.B. Smith, building designer of the Kansas State Agricultural college faculty."

Smith and Griest were both architecture students at Kansas State College in the early 1920s and reportedly members of the same campus organizations.¹⁵ Both men also attended Harvard. It is possible that Griest knew Smith and encouraged Williamson to bring him in on the project or that Smith's award at Harvard brought him to the attention of Williamson or the school board members. The precise relationship and involvement of each may never be known. The most likely scenario seems to be that Griest worked on planning the layout of the school and that Smith consulted on the exterior design and detailing.

Williamson noted the influence of Chester Woodward, the president of the Topeka Board of Education, on the design of the school. Woodward had visited Europe and was a great fan of English architecture. Woodward reportedly sent postcards of English buildings to fellow school board members. According to Wallace's history of Topeka High, at least three English landmarks inspired Topeka High: Compton Wynyates, the Warwickshire home of the Marquis of Northampton, c. 1500 (southeast and southwest entrances); Henry VIII's Great Hall at Hampton Court Palace, 1531-36 (the Library wing); and the College Tower of Magdalen College, Oxford, 1492-1509 (the tower).¹⁶ In Williamson's own writing on Topeka High, he said that the tower was not patterned after any other. He said they studied many of the famous cathedral towers in Europe but most were so ornate with expensive carvings that the cost was prohibitive.¹⁷

¹² Manhattan Republican, 18 October, 1928, 4.

¹³ "Know Your Kansans," Kansas Construction Magazine, (June, 1948) 12.

¹⁴ "Topeka Designer Takes Special Advanced Work At Harvard University," Topeka Capital, June ?, 1930. The article is in the Clipping File at the Kansas State Historical Society.

¹⁵ Patricia J. O'Brien, "Topeka High School: A Little Known Fact," unpublished article provided by the author.

¹⁶ Doug Wallace, "Where the Sunflowers Bloom - A Brief History and Guide to Topeka High School," Topeka High School Historical Society, 1999, 8.

¹⁷ Williamson, "Topeka High," 41.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

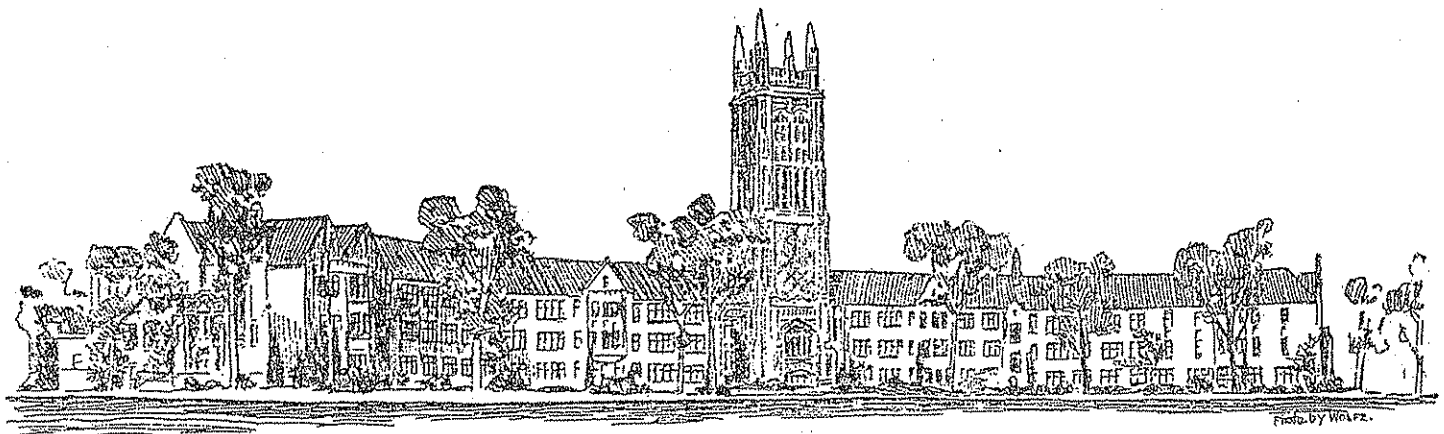
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 8 Page: 17

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

The Board of Education was very involved in the design process. With Williamson, they visited thirty schools during the initial planning process. The high schools in Gross Point, Michigan and Little Rock, Arkansas are two of the schools known to have been visited by the group. The cafeteria at Topeka High, reminiscent of a great baronial hall, is strikingly similar to the cafeteria in the Gross Pointe High School. In addition to visiting other schools for ideas, over one hundred meetings were held to solicit public input from local residents. The Board of Education took the task of the school design seriously; they reportedly agonized over the selection of brick and stone, to the point of erecting a sample wall for public inspection.¹⁸ The brick selected was an English brick with subtle variegation, hand made at a kiln east of St. Louis. The board also selected the warm, yellow Kansas Silverdale limestone.

In reference to the Board of Education during the design of the new school, Williamson later stated, "In my sixty years of architectural practice throughout the Midwest, I can truthfully say that I never met a Board that was more dedicated to the task than this one."¹⁹ Williamson had recommended to the board that all citizens be given the chance to participate in the planning of the school. By the fall of 1929, the Topeka Board of Education gave tentative approval to Williamson's design for the high school. The artist's rendering was published in the October 26th edition of the Topeka Journal.



Topeka Journal, October 26, 1929

The Construction of Topeka High School

The plans were completed and submitted for bids in December of 1929. The contracts were awarded on February 1, 1930. John M. Leeper was hired as the general contractor, Arthur Tucker as the electrical contractor, and Johnson & Beck as the plumbing and heating contractor.

Leeper was a prominent Topeka contractor who had built several buildings designed by Williamson including the Central Bank Building, Jayhawk Hotel and Theater, and Crane Junior High. Leeper had worked in Topeka for over thirty years. In the early days of his construction career, he gained the reputation of being the fastest layer of brick, west of the Mississippi.²⁰ After specializing in brick laying for fifteen years, Leeper established his construction firm and went on to build dozens of prominent buildings in the city. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Leeper was considered an authority on reinforced concrete construction.

When Leeper bid the high school project, he specified the use of materials purchased from local businesses and local labor. A September 23, 1931, Daily Capital article summarized the local firms involved in the construction of the high

¹⁸ Wallace, 8.

¹⁹ Williamson, 42.

²⁰ Topeka Daily Capital, 15 August, 1931.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

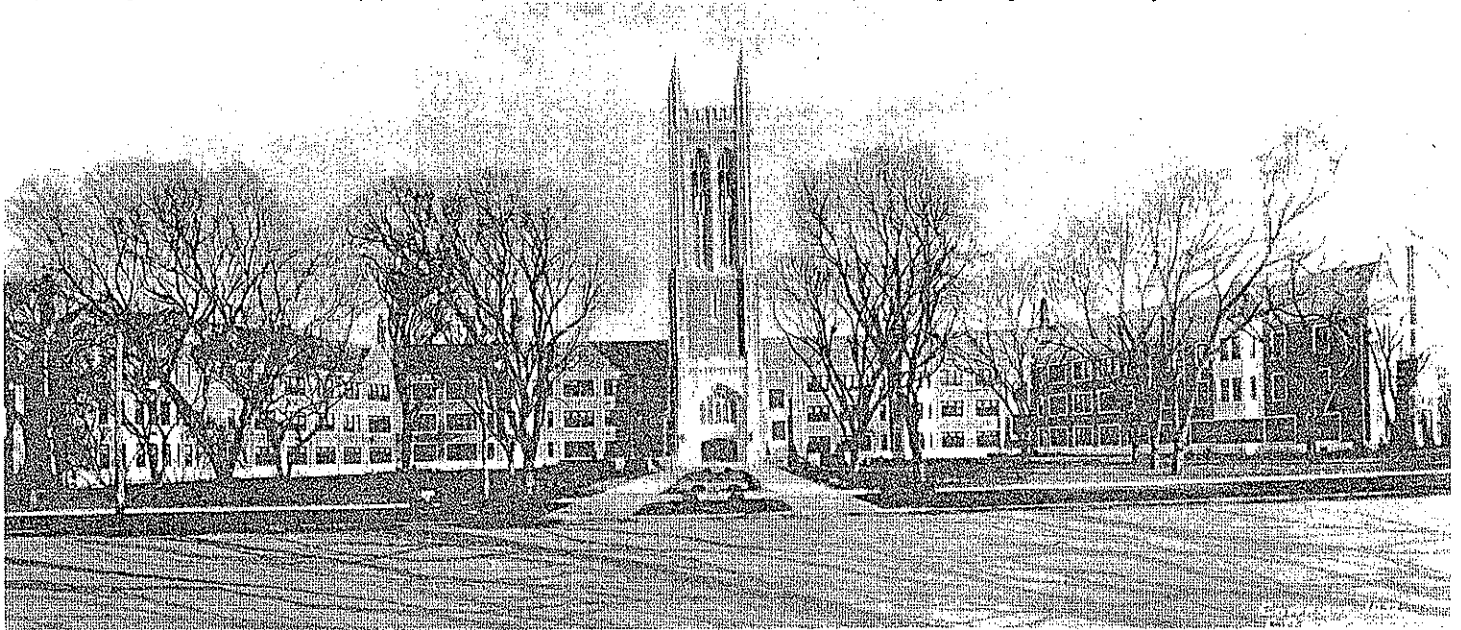
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 8 Page: 18

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

school: Jesse Warren of George Warren and Son, Co. was the roofing contractor; C.A. Allen, the painting contractor; E.J. Morand, the plaster contractor; Irvine Tile, the tile contractor; and George Foster of Foster Tile and Marble Co., was responsible for the marble, purchasing a small pocket of the unique pink and grey marble from a Tennessee quarry. Steel, iron, and metal specialties came from Capital Iron Works Co., Topeka Foundry, and the Midwest Material Co. The Bowen-Nuss-Brown Hardware Co. of Topeka furnished the door and window hardware, and Reliance Co. of Topeka furnished the refrigeration systems. Topeka's building industry provided more than 95% of all the materials used, and all but a few workers were local. The stock market crashed in October of 1929 and bids for the building were received in January 1930. Reduced prices on materials reportedly resulted in significant savings in construction costs. The school was the only major building under construction in Topeka at the time and the largest building project undertaken to that date in the city. The construction of the school provided jobs to hundreds of local men who would have been otherwise unemployed. Local and national companies actually featured the school in company and product advertisements.²¹

During construction of the school, prominent Topekan, David W. Mulvane, approached Williamson and donated \$25,000 to purchase carillon chimes for the tower. The gift was made in memory of his late wife, Helen McKenna Mulvane. Topeka High School is the only public high school in the world with an operating Deagan chime system.



Topeka High School - photo copyrighted by C.D. Schutte, 1932, available from the Kansas State Historical Society

The construction of Topeka High School was completed in 18 months, at a final cost of \$1,800,000 including the site and all equipment. Statistics on the new school building were printed in the 1932 student handbook:

Cost in 1931 - approximately \$1.75 million	1 st floor - 114,093 square feet	6660 tons of reinforces steel
General contract - \$916,320.24	2 nd floor - 108,429 square feet	14,000 cubic yards of concrete
Plumbing & heating contract - \$169,115	3 rd floor - 55,384 square feet	157 tons Vermont slate roofing
Electrical contract - \$59,939.10	500,000 face brick	7 car-loads of marble
Site - \$209,663.97	800,000 common brick	652 doors and 18,000 window sashes
Cost per cubic foot - \$0.28	253,000 partition tiles	13,000 board feet of wood trim
East/west length - approximately 540 feet	65,000 yards of plaster	76 miles of furring channels
North/south length - approximately 285 feet	650 tons of structural steel	3 car-loads of insulating material

²¹ An advertisement for the Capital Iron Works Co. in the September 4, 1930 Topeka Daily Capital includes photos of the trusses fabricated for the high school and claims they are the biggest in the city. Product advertisements for Sealex Linoleum and Vestal Chemical Laboratories in the School Board Journal (June 1932 and March 1936) feature pictures of Topeka High School.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 8 Page: 19

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

Topeka High School opened its doors in September 1931. The enrollment topped 2000 in 1931. A number of students residing outside of Topeka paid tuition to attend the new school. Thirty-one former graduates of Topeka High re-enrolled in the new school to take advantage of the expanded curriculum. The school immediately gained high stature in the community and claimed its status as a local landmark. At the time of its opening (1931), the school was named the second-best high school in the nation by the National Education Association.

Thomas Williamson, later said the following about the school's design:

"The building of the Topeka High School came at a time when a new type of school building had just come into vogue. Up to that time, most school buildings were just a square-box type building, with big banks of windows in each classroom and very little architecture. Millions of dough-boys had just returned from the war, and they had seen, in Europe, many beautifully designed buildings that had lasted for centuries and, even though some of them were war-torn, their beauty still showed through, and the boys were insisting that American public buildings should show more beauty in their architectural design. And it was this spirit that encouraged the Board of Education to attempt the ultimate beauty and simplicity in the design of the new high school."²²

Time and *Newsweek* magazines listed Topeka High School as one of the 38 best secondary schools in the nation in 1957. The centrally located school served as the capital city's only high school for thirty years. In 1958, Topeka annexed Highland Park High School into the city. In 1961, the Topeka High student body was split as 400 students left Topeka High to enter the newly constructed Topeka West High School. In 1962 the enrollment at Topeka High School was 1941; Topeka West was 920 and Highland Park, 842.

In 1974, the tower was rededicated as the Williamson Tower, named to honor the school's architect. In 1980, the schools of Topeka were reconfigured; grade schools became K-5, the junior high schools became middle schools serving grades 6-8, and the ninth grade was added to the high school. The school was recognized by the United States Department of Education in 1989 as a "School of Excellence." Aside from curriculum modifications, there have been few major changes in Topeka High School over the years. The school continues operation as one of the city's three high schools with a current student population of approximately 1700. The Topeka High Historical Society was established in 1985 and continues working to preserve the rich history of the school.

Summary

Topeka High School is eligible for listing on the National Register under Criteria A and C. It is significant on a state and local level as the public high school that has served the capital city for nearly seventy-five years. Completed in 1931, the school was a crowning achievement in the sixty year career of Topeka architect, Thomas Wilson Williamson. It is one of the finest examples of Collegiate Gothic architecture in the State of Kansas.

The property retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, and association. The building has experienced only two major exterior alterations – the replacement of doors and windows, and the addition of a small greenhouse on the north side of the east wing. The windows are similar in style and profile to the original, and the original transom configuration has been retained at the exterior doors. The greenhouse is barely visible given its location and dense vegetation. A new free-standing gymnasium is now under construction on the site, northwest of the school. The interior of the building has undergone remodeling and modernization of some features and finishes. Some rooms have been re-configured and suspended ceilings and contemporary lighting installed throughout. However, the original corridor configuration has been maintained and significant interior features and finishes are in place. The building is one of the most historically intact operating schools in the state. It retains a high degree of integrity on the interior and exterior and clearly portrays its original character.

Topeka High School is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under the multiple property documentation form, *Historic Public Schools of Kansas*, as a representative of the City High School property type.

²² Williamson, "Topeka High," 42.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 9-10 & Additional Documentation Page: 20

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

Bibliography

1940 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Topeka, Kansas.

Advertisements, School Board Journal. (April 1932): 81, (June 1932): 87 and (March 1936): 49.

Callison, Danny and Judy Cromwell, eds. A.T.H.S. (Topeka High School) Scrapbook. Topeka: Hall Lithographing Co., Inc., 1979.

Davis, Christy. National Register Nomination for Lincoln School, Newton, Kansas.

Fergus, W. Lee. Ed. Forty Years in the Topeka High School. Topeka: Western Publishing Co., 1910.

Fitzgerald, Daniel, ed. Gone But Not Forgotten: The Lost School of Topeka. Bulletin No. 67, November 1990. Topeka: Shawnee County Historical Society.

"From Sea to Shining Sea," National Geographic. (July, 1961): 33.

Halsley, Casey S. "Topeka High School – The Building: A Study for Historical Preservation," an unpublished paper for The Law of Historic Preservation, University of Kansas School of Law, 1981.

Harris, Cyril M. Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1983

Heitz, Lisa Hefner. "Standing Tall and Stately," Kansas!. (3rd issue, 1986): 34-36.

Hubbard, J.R. "Vision of Model High School Now Nearing Reality," Topeka Daily Capital, 50th Anniversary Edition. 25 August, 1929.

Kansas Industrialist. 13 May, 1931, and 13 March, 1935.

Kansas State Collegian. 10 October, 1928; and 15 March, 1935.

Kansas State Historical Society. Clipping File – Topeka High School, Volumes 1 and 2.

Kansas State Historical Society. Photographs of Topeka High School.

Linn, John H. "The New Topeka High School," Kansas Teacher. 5 (October, 1932): 21-24.

Linn, John H. "Topeka Houses Its Senior High School," School Board Journal. (April, 1932): 40-46.

Love, Ed. "Topeka High School – A Short History," speech given at the 1983 annual meeting of the Shawnee County Historical Society in Topeka, Kansas.

Manhattan Chronicle. 15 August, 1931.

Manhattan Mercury. 14 June, 1934.

Manhattan Republic. 11 February, 1926; and 18 October, 1928.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 9-10 & Additional Documentation Page: 21

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

O'Brien, Patricia J. "Topeka High School: A Little Known Fact," unpublished article on Linus Burr Smith and his involvement in the design of Topeka High School, provided by author.

Spencer, Brenda R. *Historic Public Schools of Kansas*, National Register Multiple Property Nomination, 2004.

The Publications Department, Topeka High School. Sixty-Two Year of History in the Topeka High School. Topeka: The College Press, 1932.

Topeka Daily Capital. 25 October, 1928; 12 January, 1929; 4 September, 1930; 18 January, 1931; 15 August, 1931; 23 September, 1931; 12 February, 1943; and 16 July, 1974.

Topeka Journal. 8 June, 1926; 21 July, 1928; 26 October, 1929; 7 January, 1930; 14 September, 1948; 11 June, 1955; 22 April, 1969; 30 July, 1974; and 16 July, 1979.

Van Slyck, W.N. "Topeka's New High School – Finest in the West," Santa Fe Magazine. 26 (December, 1931): 19-26.

Wallace, Douglass W. "Where The Sunflowers Bloom – A Brief History and Guide to the Topeka High School." Topeka High School Historical Society, 1999.

Whiffen, Marcus. American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.

Williamson, Thomas W. "Topeka High," Topeka Magazine. 1 (April, 1974): 40-42. (Reprinted as pamphlet by Topeka High Historical Society in 1986).

Williamson, Thomas. Unpublished memoirs, section on construction of Topeka High School obtained from Topeka historian, Doug Wallace.

Credits:

Significant information was provided by Joan Barker of the Topeka High School Historical Society.

The Journalism Department of Topeka High School provided digital scans of early photographs of Topeka High School held in the collection of the Topeka Historical Society.

Topeka historian Douglass Wallace shared his collection of information on Topeka High School including Thomas Williamson's memoirs as well as recollections of a personal discussion with Linus Burr Smith in the early 1980s.

Design and construction documents for Topeka High School (by Thomas Williamson and Company) were obtained from the Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas.

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description - Point of Beginning-NW corner 10th & Polk, then WLY 740 (S), NLY 980(S), ELY 274(S), SLY 580(S), ELY 466(S), SLY 400 (S) to Point of Beginning. This site reflects the original tract and a second adjoining tract purchased by the Topeka Board of Education in 1928 and 1929 respectively. It is comprised of four city blocks bordered by 10th Avenue on the south, Polk Street on the east, Western Avenue on the west, and 8th Street on the north, less the northeast quarter of the site occupied by Grace Episcopal Church.

Boundary Justification – The site is comprised of the school building and grounds and is clearly defined by geographic features.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section: 9-10 & Additional Documentation Page: 22

Historic Public Schools of Kansas
Topeka High School, Shawnee County, Kansas

Additional Documentation

Maps

USGS map attached

Figure 1 – USGS Aerial photo, 1981

Figure 2 – 1940 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

Historic Views

Figure 3 – Postcard – Topeka High School (1894) and Manual Training School (1905)

Figure 4 – Postcards - Topeka High School

Figure 5 – Early photos of Topeka High School from the Topeka High Historical Society

Original Drawings

Figure 6 - Plans and select elevations of the original construction documents by Thomas Williamson.

Figure 7 - Listing of schools designed by Thomas Williamson.

Source: The Williamson Collection, Spencer Research Library, Special Collections, University of Kansas Libraries.

Photographs

Photos were taken by Brenda Spencer September 10, 2004. KSHS holds the original negatives.

#	Description of View [direction of camera]
#1	South (front) facade [northeast]
#2	South (front) facade from 10 th Avenue [north]
#3	Detail – base of tower at main entrance [north]
#4	West side of front facade from main entrance [west]
#5	East side of front facade from main entrance [east]
#6	North side of east wing (library) [southwest]
#7	East facade – Constitution plaza/auditorium entrance [west]
#8	Detail - Auditorium door, east facade [northwest]
#9	Detail - Entrance on north end of east facade [west]
#10	Rear (north) facade-east end [southwest]
#11	Rear (north) facade-west end [southeast]
#12	West facade-gymnasium entrance [northeast]
#13	Detail - Auditorium entrance on north end of west facade [east]
#14	North facade of west wing [southeast]
#15	Detail - oriel window on southwest end of west wing [northeast]
#16	Interior - Foyer inside front entrance [southwest]
#17	Interior – Main Stairway (off front entrance) from 2 nd floor [southwest]
#18	Interior – East stairwell, 2 nd floor main corridor [east]
#19	Interior – "Typical" door, 2 nd floor, center core [east]
#20	Interior – Rest room, 1 st floor east wing [northeast]
#21	Interior – Nurses station, 1 st floor main corridor [northeast]
#22	Interior – Woodworking shop, 1 st floor north corridor [west]
#23	Interior – The Classical room, 2 nd floor, west wing [northeast]
#24	Interior – The English room, 3 rd floor, west wing [northeast]
#25	Interior – Detail of fireplace in English room, 3 rd floor west wing [southwest]
#26	Interior – Auditorium, east end 1 st floor [northeast]
#27	Interior – Auditorium, east end 1 st floor [northwest]
#28	Interior – Gymnasium, west end 1 st floor [northwest]
#29	Interior – Library, 2 nd floor east wing [southeast]
#30	Interior – Detail of leaded glass window on 2 nd floor over main entrance [south]
#31	Interior – Deagan Chime mechanism, 2 nd level of tower room [southwest]

426

TOPEKA HIGH SCHOOL
SHAWNEE COUNTY, KAN
UTM REFERENCE
ZONE 15
EASTING 267600
NORTHING 4325647

T 11 S

T 12 S

2'30"

EAST TOPEKA INTERCHANGE 0.3 MI.

426

INTERCHANGE 20 MI.
U.S. 69 & 169 57 MI.

